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Palo Alto

September 5, 1959

Dr. Maurice Ewing
Lamont Geological Observatory
Palisades, N.Y.

Dear Maurice:

Your letter of the 13th was finally forwarded from Wisconsin (I am here permanently now); I am afraid there was an even longer delay occasioned by my having to oversee moving my lab. into the new medical center.

As to the research proposal-- I am delighted that you were going ahead with a plan to ~~XXXX~~ look at the microbiology of the sediments. However, I would not be too optimistic that your proposal would get a very high priority. The general concept is excellent, and your own participation an indispensable help. But I do not think the microbiological aspects have been written up in a particularly inspiring way --parts of it are really quite naive-- and I really think you should enlist a more experienced group of cooperators to oversee them. The study of pressure-dependent organisms would be of the most general interest, and I would recommend that you consult such people as Bill MacElroy at Johns Hopkins and Seymour Hutner at the Haskins Laboratory, (305 E 43 St, NY 17) to get the most out of the samples. Francis Ryan at Columbia should be an invaluable cohort for this kind of thing too.

In any case, I hope that you will be able to keep some of your samples under high pressure, frozen under dry ice perhaps, for later analysis, even if you don't get this program fully organized before your next expedition. I would be rather dubious of the value of doing much of the actual analysis in the field.

I have discussed your proposal confidentially with some other microbiologists here, and they concurred in this evaluation. I would stress that a broad, but rather superficial survey (e.g. for antibiosis) would be far less valuable than an attack on some specific ecological and physiological problems, e.g., specific adaptations to growth under high pressure, low temperature, and the other environmental factors of the polar seas and sediments. Why put too much stress on polar marine sediments when ~~so~~ so little good work has been done on sediments anywhere-- or is this to tie in specifically with an antarctic program. If the latter, then why just the marine side?

As to your other questions about Columbia microbiology, after some thought I've decided I'd just as soon not get involved in institutional politics elsewhere. I have talked about this with Francis Ryan, who would and should be most centrally involved in any reorientation. He did not feel very optimistic about the possibilities. I suggest, however, that you talk to him -- if I can be of any help then to you and him, please call on me. I don't think I should write to Kirk on my own initiative.

Yours sincerely,


Joshua Lederberg

Ewe

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